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Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 15 July 2008, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. Park In-kook (Vice-President) ..... (Republic of Korea)

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In the absence of Mr. Mérorès (Haiti), Mr. Park In-kook (Republic of Korea), Vice-President, took the chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance (E/2008/71 and E/2008/80)

1. **The President** said that the humanitarian affairs segment, organized around the theme of "building capabilities and capacities at all levels for timely humanitarian assistance, including disaster risk reduction", offered an opportunity for the Council, joined by the international humanitarian community, to discuss how best to respond to the growing humanitarian implications of the current food security crisis and of natural disasters. Member States would be able to reiterate their commitment to upholding the principles of United Nations humanitarian action — humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence — and to reaffirm their responsibility for their citizens' well-being. They should be prepared to face increasingly complex emergencies that disregarded national boundaries, but also to allow and facilitate humanitarian aid and support from regional and international partners.

2. **Mr. Holmes** (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator) recalled that, when speaking to the Council in 2007, he had predicted an increase in disasters associated with natural hazards that reflected the impact of climate change. That prediction had proven correct; in the past year, natural disasters had been 90 per cent more frequent than in 1987. The many victims of the Sichuan earthquake had received rapid assistance, largely thanks to early national intervention, while the situation of the victims of Cyclone Nargis had been more complicated; an effective assistance operation had been put in place, but only after avoidable delays in access for international humanitarian staff and assets. The impact of natural disasters, while heaviest in Asia, had also been felt in Africa and Latin America, reinforcing the importance of early warning, disaster preparedness and disaster risk reduction measures. A priority in both Myanmar and China should be "building back better" with disaster risk reduction in mind.

3. The complex emergencies of 2008 had included the challenges of providing humanitarian assistance and protecting civilians. Because of long-running conflict, displacement and deprivation had befallen millions in Darfur, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Chad, the Central African Republic, Gaza and Iraq. The demand for humanitarian assistance would continue to increase as a result of those continuing problems, combined with the greater incidence and severity of natural disasters and the global food crisis. The international community should be prepared to look for new sources of financial support in response to that demand.

4. In recent years, there had been much emphasis on reminding State and non-State actors, as well as humanitarian partners, of the principles of United Nations humanitarian action so that humanitarian workers could reach populations in need properly and in time and vulnerable populations could receive life-saving assistance. Humanitarian workers were still viewed with suspicion in many places and prevented from reaching those in need by bureaucratic hurdles and safety and security challenges, including deliberate attacks. A recent example was the murder of Mr. Ali Osman Ahmed, head of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) office in Mogadishu.

5. Humanitarian workers' efforts were wasted when personnel, equipment and supplies could not be delivered. In the recent past, insecurity had affected the delivery of aid in Afghanistan, Darfur, Iraq and Somalia. The international community should condemn increased attacks on humanitarian workers and make their safety and security a priority. With reliance on national staff becoming more common in some situations, their loss might be seen as less significant than that of international staff, who attracted more media attention. There must be no double standard in that regard.

6. While the challenges of providing humanitarian assistance were increasing, so too was the number of vulnerable populations. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had reported an increase in the global refugee population to 11.4 million, and the figure used in forecasting the needs of individuals displaced by violent conflict had reached 26 million in 2008; further millions had been displaced by natural disasters. Humanitarian emergencies were becoming more serious because the increase in food prices had led to a global food crisis that affected not just fragile States, but those previously considered to be in a stable

situation. As always, the poorest and most vulnerable were the first and most seriously affected. With 800 million people currently hungry, the World Bank predicted at least a further 100 million victims. A joint appeal for US$ 404 million for Afghanistan and for US$ 325 million for Ethiopia had been launched.

7. For the sake of a sustainable solution, the international community must provide an immediate, unified response to both the immediate humanitarian needs and the longer-term structural issues that hindered food production. The Secretary-General's High-level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis was an important framework for unifying policy within the United Nations system and the Bretton Woods institutions and ensuring comprehensive, coordinated action to help national Governments, protect the most vulnerable from hunger and starvation and promote sustained investment to correct the long-standing neglect of agriculture and rural development. All actors and stakeholders — governments, civil society, the private sector and regional organizations — knew what efforts were needed and should ensure that they were made. However, not only were food assistance needs dramatically rising, so too were the costs of meeting those needs. Additional resources must be found — for example, to assist the World Food Programme (WFP) — but other steps could also be taken, such as exempting humanitarian food purchases from the export restrictions or taxes imposed by some countries.

8. Climate change had humanitarian implications. Rising sea levels could affect nearly 634 million people, and increasingly frequent storms, floods and drought were harming the livelihoods of millions; alterations in disease patterns caused by increased flooding could lead to higher rates of waterborne illnesses; and while rising temperatures were increasing the likelihood and range of malaria epidemics in Africa. Climatic extremes could worsen struggles for the control of limited resources, leading to more intense conflicts, population displacement and refugees fleeing areas affected by climatic phenomena.

9. The Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in Poznań in December 2008, was a potential milestone in advancing climate change negotiations and promoting synergies between the humanitarian and climate change communities. Strengthening disaster risk reduction and implementing the Hyogo Framework for Action should provide key policy guidance.

10. The international humanitarian community had been working for some time to improve its ability to address mounting and interdependent humanitarian response needs, including by launching a programme to improve preparedness, country-level leadership and accountability in 2005. Through a cluster approach that designated thematic lead agencies at the global and field levels for areas that had previously lacked clear leadership, response gaps were being addressed. That approach was a better way to organize the international response in each key sector and to work with national governments, the first and most important responders to any crisis; in the previous year, it had been implemented in 14 new countries.

11. Effective programming was possible only with flexible, equitable funding of humanitarian activities. Funding should be disbursed in a more prioritized and targeted manner, based on humanitarian needs. The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) had received solid support from over 90 State donors. While the recently conducted independent evaluation of the Fund had indicated considerable progress towards its principal objective of speeding up response to sudden-onset emergencies, it had also indicated ways to improve the functioning and effectiveness of that key humanitarian financing tool.

12. At the country level, CERF and the Common Humanitarian Funds allowed better channelling of financing towards neglected sectors in various emergencies. Further efforts to prioritize the allocation of resources, were complemented by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs initiative, mandated by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, to support the development of a global needs assessment framework.

13. Governments and humanitarian organizations must work together to build a response system able to address the needs of millions; national and local capacity-building, early warning, contingency planning and preparedness remained key priorities. Humanitarian action, driven by a clear moral imperative, must not conceal any political or other agenda. Host governments bore the primary responsibility for the safety and security of humanitarian personnel on their territories and must do

more to prosecute the perpetrators of violence against aid workers and their activities and programmes.

14. **Mr. Hunte** (Observer for Antigua and Barbuda), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the countries of the Group had experienced frequent humanitarian emergencies and supported a strong, timely and coordinated response; a single disaster could set back a developing country by several decades. Affected States, donor countries, the United Nations system and other humanitarian organizations should work together to provide humanitarian assistance and support for development, while recognizing the primary role of the affected State.

15. The United Nations system and the international community played a unique role in enhancing developing countries' existing humanitarian capacities and institutions, by promoting access to and transfer of new technology, funding and expertise in order to improve preparedness, respond rapidly to natural disasters and mitigate their impact, address the long-term challenges of recovery and reduce future risks.

16. While States bore the primary responsibility for caring for the victims of humanitarian emergencies within their borders, the magnitude and duration of such events often surpassed their response capacities. A strong commitment to addressing the special needs of those disproportionately affected by emergencies, including armed conflict, must be made. Civilian victims, especially women, children and other vulnerable individuals, were often deprived of resources and suffered human rights violations and atrocities. Empowering those groups and mainstreaming gender considerations helped their situation and contributed to conflict resolution.

17. Humanitarian operations, particularly in the case of complex emergencies, could not succeed without access to those requiring assistance. In accordance with the relevant provisions of national and international law and international humanitarian law, safe and unhindered access should be provided for the humanitarian personnel of the United Nations and other humanitarian agencies and organizations working with the consent of the affected State.

18. The primary role of the affected State in the initiation, organization, coordination and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory should be respected, as should the guiding principles contained in the annex to General Assembly resolution 46/182 on strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations. States should respect fully their obligations under the relevant international instruments, including the 1994 Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel, and should meet their obligation under international humanitarian law, in particular the 1949 Geneva Conventions, to protect and assist civilians in occupied territories.

19. Recognizing the clear relationship between relief, rehabilitation and development, the Group believed that humanitarian assistance should be provided in a manner which supported recovery and long-term development and with the requisite coordination between humanitarian and development actors. However, assistance must not be seen as a substitute for international development cooperation. More attention should be paid to resources, particularly in the case of underfunded emergencies, and to the role of financial institutions during the post-disaster recovery phase. The Group looked forward to examining the outcome of the independent evaluation of CERF during the sixty-third session of the General Assembly.

20. **Mr. Ripert** (France), speaking on behalf of the European Union; the candidate countries Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey; the stabilization and association process countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro; and, in addition, Armenia and the Republic of Moldova, reiterated the European Union's support for the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and for the office's role as global coordinator of international humanitarian assistance.

21. In view of the increasing frequency and severity of humanitarian emergencies in recent years, respect for humanitarian principles was more important than ever. The European Union was committed to maintaining and promoting the fundamental principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence and agreed that access was a prerequisite for humanitarian operations; international humanitarian law and the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions obliged all parties to facilitate the safe passage of relief consignments in a rapid manner.

22. The European Union was extremely concerned by the restrictions placed on humanitarian workers, which ranged from deliberate attacks and harassment to crossing-point closures and administrative obstacles and demonstrated a complete disregard for humanitarian principles, and urged Governments to ensure the safety and security of humanitarian personnel within their territory. It commended the Organization on its efforts to further increase capacity and was particularly pleased that coordination in the field had been strengthened through the cluster approach. Given the convergence of views on those issues between the European Union and the Group of 77 and China, he was confident that negotiations on that part of the humanitarian affairs segment's outcome document could be concluded without difficulty.

23. As the main provider of humanitarian assistance worldwide, the European Union supported the various funding mechanisms that had been established, namely the Consolidated Appeal Process and flash appeals, the common humanitarian funds and emergency response funds at the field level, and CERF at the global level. It welcomed the contributions made to CERF thus far and, collectively, hoped to meet its target of $500 million.

24. Another way to ensure more effective humanitarian response was through better civil-military cooperation. As noted in the Secretary-General's report (E/2008/71, para. 53), a lack of coordination during the deployment of military assets might compromise the affected country's ability to use those assets effectively. Moreover, the freedom of movement of humanitarian assistance was sometimes restricted when military and humanitarian personnel worked together without proper coordination. OCHA could play a vital coordination role in that respect by improving the ability of resident and humanitarian coordinators to assist Governments in determining whether military assets were needed and, if so, how they could be used most effectively. The European Union fully respected the Oslo Guidelines and the guidelines on the use of military and civil defence assets to support United Nations humanitarian activities in complex emergencies.

25. The European Union was extremely concerned by the increase in sexual violence in emergencies, and welcomed the coalition "United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Crisis". Urgent steps must be taken to prevent sexual violence, scale up support to victims and combat impunity. In that regard, he called for effective implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and welcomed the adoption of resolution 1820 (2008).

26. **Mr. Yoseph** (Observer for Ethiopia), speaking on behalf of the Group of African States, welcomed the fact that the report of the Secretary-General (E/2008/71) focused on two issues of concern: the humanitarian implications of climate change and the humanitarian challenges of the global food crisis. Climate change was a major factor in soaring food and fuel prices, which in turn exacerbated global food insecurity. In the past year alone, most regions had experienced multiple natural disasters. Serious disasters such as the China earthquake and the Myanmar cyclone demonstrated the need for all parties to assess their humanitarian assistance capacity. He commended OCHA, United Nations agencies, donor countries and humanitarian partners on their efforts in responding to challenges and providing assistance to people in need.

27. In Africa, unprecedented rainfall had caused some of the worst and most widespread flooding in the continent's history, killing over 200 people, displacing over 600,000 and affecting millions. Africa did not have the capacity or resources to reduce the impact of such calamities and make a speedy recovery; effective humanitarian interventions were essential. The Group agreed that there was an urgent need to increase investment in disaster risk reduction and preparedness in high-risk settings and to mobilize support for addressing the humanitarian impacts of climate change, but that support must also be given to Member States so that they could improve their own disaster preparedness capacity.

28. The international community had responded generously to the World Food Programme (WFP) appeal for special funds to mitigate the impact of the global food crisis; more resources needed to be mobilized, however, as the most vulnerable developing countries might well experience a severe reduction in food aid. He hoped that the High-level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis would address that situation and find an appropriate response.

29. Sufficient and flexible funding was critical if humanitarian needs were to be met effectively. In that regard, the United Nations and donor effort to establish common humanitarian funds in Africa should be

pursued and contributions to that and other funding mechanisms should be strengthened in order to ensure predictable, timely and needs-based access to resources and an effective response to global humanitarian challenges.

30. **Mr. Abdelrahman** (Sudan) said that his country had many years' experience in humanitarian coordination, including through Operation Lifeline Sudan, the coordination mechanism on droughts and floods and, most recently, the Darfur coordination mechanism. He commended donors, United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for their efforts in Darfur and strongly condemned the recent killings of humanitarian workers by rebels. His Government's efforts were reflected in the fact that mortality and malnutrition rates in Darfur were well below critical and 500,000 refugees and internally displaced persons had returned home. The main concern at present was the situation in the refugee camps.

31. Under a programme established following the adoption of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005, 2.5 million refugees and internally displaced persons had returned to their homes in the south of the country. Unfortunately, they did not always find the basic services they expected on arrival; three years after the adoption of that Agreement, donors had still not met their commitment in that regard.

32. His Government had established a mechanism whereby humanitarian convoys were provided with armed escorts; since April 2008, 45,000 tons of goods per month had been transported in that manner. With regard to the joint United Nations/African Union mechanism for verifying and investigating rape claims, he was pleased to report that since January 2008, there had been no reports of rape in Darfur. Thus, his Government was doing its part and cooperating well with the United Nations agencies on the ground. As part of such cooperation, the capacities of national institutions, NGOs and civil society should be strengthened. Almost half the NGOs and three quarters of the humanitarian workers operating in the country were Sudanese, yet only a small percentage of the humanitarian resources received was allocated to national institutions.

33. Many presidential decrees had been issued with a view to the facilitation of humanitarian assistance. Assistance to Darfur was provided through a fast-track system. His Government was currently offering training to local authorities and NGOs, United Nations agencies and other partners on the ground in order to ensure that its policies were implemented properly; coordination with the United Nations was particularly important.

34. **Mr. Lenz** (Observer for Switzerland) said that Switzerland attached great importance to strengthening the architecture for discussion of humanitarian issues within the United Nations. The segment's outcome document should focus on specific issues and provide appropriate policy guidance. The recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's report (E/2008/71) should guide the Council in that regard. Issues relating to the more general framework of humanitarian action should be discussed in the context of the relevant General Assembly resolutions.

35. The usefulness of thematic planning in the Council's work had been demonstrated by its treatment of the issue of foreign military assets in disaster relief. His delegation welcomed the results of the independent study mentioned in paragraph 5 of the report and looked forward to discussing the issue further at the side event scheduled later that week. He noted with concern the incomplete implementation of the Oslo Guidelines, the dissemination and implementation of which were more important than ever.

36. He encouraged all organizations participating in the High-level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis to continue to support the efforts of the Governments concerned. The global dimension of the crisis called for multisectoral programmes based on, and adapted to, specific needs.

37. His delegation agreed that humanitarian assistance should be needs-based; indeed, that was the real meaning of neutrality. Needs assessments should also be integrated into local and national plans to build preparedness for response in line with priority five of the Hyogo Framework for Action. Efforts to strengthen emergency response capacity must also include voluntary measures to improve humanitarian operations; in 2007, the Swiss Federal Administration's humanitarian rapid response team had received International Organization for Standardization (ISO) certification.

38. For many years, Switzerland had participated in efforts to solve problems relating to access in situations of armed conflict. Recently, it had organized a meeting

of experts aimed at facilitating an exchange of experience and views between government, civilian and military representatives and humanitarian organizations. One of the meeting's main aims had been to identify obstacles encountered on the ground; participants had also discussed the nature and extent of State consent to grant access to humanitarian organizations. The exact nature of follow-up to that event had not yet been determined.

39. Lastly, he acknowledged the considerable efforts to reform the Organization's humanitarian system, particularly by strengthening the resident and humanitarian coordinator system. OCHA should rely more on the funds, programmes and specialized agencies of the United Nations; it would then be able to concentrate on its core functions.

40. **Mr. Davide** (Philippines) said that in the 10 years that had passed since the establishment of OCHA and the Council's first humanitarian affairs segment, the United Nations had provided an integrated response to complex emergencies involving many stakeholders, recognizing that each emergency had its own unique demands and sensitivities. It had established the CERF and drawn up policy guidance on, inter alia, the protection of civilians in armed conflict and the negotiation of humanitarian principles and access.

41. Much more could be done, however, to help countries prevent tragedies from escalating into emergency situations. United Nations resources could be used to mitigate the impact of natural and man-made disasters by helping States establish systems and procedures and build national capacity for providing immediate assistance. The coordinating capacity of the United Nations would be required in order to encourage developed countries and development partners to provide training and technology transfer. Enabling countries to prevent or minimize the impact of disasters and provide immediate assistance might also prevent donor fatigue.

42. Climate change had the greatest impact not on developed countries — which were primarily responsible for the problem — but on developing countries. Developed countries and development partners must find ways to help affected countries help themselves.

43. The international community's current strategy for tackling the global food crisis provided a good model. The Comprehensive Framework for Action developed by the High-level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis provided clear strategies for addressing the issue and should be strongly endorsed by the Council in the outcome document of the segment. His delegation hoped that the next 10 years would see more independent action by affected countries and more focused interventions by the United Nations.

44. **Mr. Shinyo** (Japan) expressed concern at the frequency with which major natural disasters were hitting Asia. Member States should ask themselves whether the international response was effective, whether the Organization was addressing all the issues that such disasters raised and how best to reform the United Nations system to that end. He therefore welcomed the agreement reached on the humanitarian cluster of the mandate review process; humanitarian reform must be promoted vigorously by improving the humanitarian coordinator system, the cluster approach and the CERF.

45. Japan had long stressed the importance of disaster preparedness and risk reduction. While the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was to be commended for its leading role in responding to the humanitarian emergency caused by the Myanmar cyclone, the region would benefit even more if regional organizations promoted preventive measures as well. In May 2008, his Government had announced its intention to promote cooperation on disaster preparedness and risk reduction; in June 2008, Japan, China and the Republic of Korea had agreed to promote such cooperation; and Japan, the United States and Australia had agreed to strengthen cooperation and enhance emergency response capacity in the Asia-Pacific region.

46. Japan's centuries of experience in dealing with natural hazards had enabled it to develop risk reduction technology, which could be drawn upon to strengthen the international community's response capacity and used by the recently established Hyogo Office of the Inter-Agency Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN/ISDR).

47. The international community needed to promote climate change adaptation and strengthen early warning mechanisms. Japan would provide some $10 billion in assistance under its Cool Earth Promotion Programme and had initiated cooperation with over 20 countries.

48. His delegation was pleased that the role of disaster risk reduction as an essential element in climate change adaptation was reflected in the segment's draft outcome document. In the Hokkaido Toyako Summit Leaders Declaration, adopted the previous week, the members of the Group of Eight had expressed their determination to adopt, with all parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the goal of reducing global emissions by at least 50 per cent by 2050. In a statement on global food security made at that Summit, the Group of Eight had announced that, they were addressing the urgent needs of the most vulnerable people in the short-term; affirmed that it was imperative to remove export restrictions and expedite current World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations aimed at introducing stricter disciplines on trade actions which prolonged and aggravated the situation and hindered humanitarian purchases of food commodities; and commended the leadership of the United Nations and Bretton Woods institutions in convening the High-level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis to establish the Comprehensive Framework for Action.

49. His delegation welcomed the independent study on the use of foreign military assets in disaster relief and took note of the conclusions and recommendations contained therein.

50. Lastly, he commended all humanitarian personnel for their selflessness and dedication in carrying out their responsibilities under difficult conditions and offered condolences to the families of those who had lost their lives or suffered grievous harm in the course of humanitarian operations. He welcomed the report of the Independent Panel on Safety and Security of United Nations Personnel and Premises and requested the Secretary-General to implement the recommendations contained therein.

51. **Mr. Abdi** (Indonesia) observed that the conjunction of the global economic downturn and natural and man-made disasters made the timely provision of humanitarian assistance essential. There was still room for improvement in the areas of coordination, effectiveness and building stronger partnerships.

52. Humanitarian assistance should be provided only with the consent of the affected country. However, most developing countries lacked the capacity to provide timely relief to their populations or to manage the subsequent recovery and must be helped to develop disaster preparedness plans in line with the risk reduction priorities of the Hyogo Framework for Action. Indonesia had been the nation hardest hit by the 2004 tsunami. In the aftermath of the 2006 earthquakes and, with support from the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN/ISDR) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), it had helped prepare its local governments by developing wide-ranging, interdisciplinary risk reduction plans adapted to local conditions in the hope that a decentralized policy would provide quicker and more effective assistance when disaster struck.

53. Every government should conduct an evaluation of its post-disaster recovery in order to demonstrate its accountability and transparency. Donors, the United Nations system and the international community could then help it build back better and resume long-term development. In addition to natural disasters, complex hazards caused by man and nature, such as the recent food crisis, might have been prevented had there been an early warning system on food security, or climate change. Continued support for the humanitarian assistance provided by the United Nations system, from relief to development, was of the utmost importance if all the internationally agreed development goals were to be fulfilled.

54. **Ms. Norton** (Canada), said that in the past year, international humanitarian action had brought hope and relief to millions worldwide and better coordination had made for more timely response. There had been agency reforms and a growing recognition of the importance of disaster risk reduction and preparedness pursuant to the Hyogo Framework for Action. Yet there were also many continuing challenges. Full, safe and unhindered access to those in need remained the critical challenge and a fundamental principle of international humanitarian action, yet it was too often an elusive goal, as in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis or Zimbabwe. The safety of humanitarian workers was increasingly at risk, and Member States had a responsibility to prosecute those responsible for attacks on them. The current food crisis was also affecting the collective capacity to meet the needs of populations. Canada was therefore providing $230 million for food aid in 2008/2009 and was untying its entire food aid budget and opening it to international procurement, especially from developing countries allowing

commodities to be purchased more cheaply locally and regionally.

55. The cluster approach had created a stronger spirit of cooperation among everyone involved in humanitarian work, helped identify gaps in response capacity, made it easier to share information, defined centres of accountability and enabled more effective advocacy. Where performance had lagged — as in the early recovery and protection clusters — OCHA should address the problems involved. That Office was to be applauded for its good management of CERF, to which Canada had pledged over $190 million. An independent evaluation had shown the Fund's effectiveness in saving lives during emergencies.

56. Experienced leaders and coordinators were needed and it should be a priority to strengthen the selection, capacity and central role of the humanitarian coordinators. In light of the political will and the resources available, the Council had an important opportunity to improve the way the humanitarian system functioned.

57. **Mr. Nebenzya** (Russian Federation) said that in the face of increased demand, the humanitarian community should adhere to the guiding principles established by the General Assembly in its resolution 46/182 on strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations, which sought to preserve its non-political character; any attempt to undertake humanitarian action without adhering to the resolution would politicize and harm international consensus on the issue.

58. Priority should be given to strengthening disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels, the fifth of the priorities for action established at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, held in Hyogo in 2005. Close attention should also be paid to the global food crisis by addressing its causes and taking preventive action. The convening of a special meeting of the General Assembly on the global food and energy crisis and of the High-Level Conference on World Food Security had been a positive step; the Council, too, should pay close attention to topical humanitarian issues, taking care to adhere to all official procedures.

59. Welcoming CERF and the recent independent evaluation of the Fund, his delegation called for improvement of the mechanisms for mobilizing resources for humanitarian action through a wider donor base and an emphasis on consolidated appeals. OCHA should continue to maximize the potential of the humanitarian coordinators and to improve capacity, predictability and accountability in the delivery of assistance.

60. **Mr. Hagen** (United States of America) said that the impartiality, humanity, neutrality and independence of any humanitarian operation were fundamental to its success, as was unimpeded access to populations in need, since critical assistance administered rapidly had the potential to minimize suffering and loss of life. The deliberate obstruction of life-saving assistance through military, political, bureaucratic or any other means was unacceptable.

61. The Secretary-General's report (E/2008/71) outlined a series of challenges and emphasized the humanitarian implications of climate change. His Government recognized the seriousness of that problem and the importance of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, enhancing energy security and promoting sustainable development. However, it believed that it was not possible to link specific natural disasters to climate change alone and that to do so detracted from an effective response to catastrophic circumstances. Equal attention must be payed to non-climate-related disasters such as the recent earthquake in China and the complex emergency in Darfur. Moreover, weather extremes depended not only on changes in climate, but also on alterations in ecosystems and on the societal, physical and economic vulnerability of populations.

62. A further challenge to humanitarian assistance outlined in the Secretary-General's report was the global food crisis. Many factors contributed to higher food prices: rising fuel and transportation costs, poor harvests, export restrictions, unprecedented though welcome economic growth and the associated increase in the demand for food worldwide. Biofuel production was only one such factor, and through significant investment in research and development of new technologies, the United States was working to ensure that it did not lead to environmental and food security problems.

63. Overcoming the global food crisis would require both immediate emergency assistance and long-term action. The United States was pursuing an integrated, three-pronged strategy: targeting vulnerable countries, assisting countries capable of rapidly increasing their

staple food production and supporting trade liberalization and the use of advanced agricultural technologies. It encouraged other governments to conclude an ambitious agreement, during the Doha Round of trade negotiations, that would increase market access for agricultural products and reduce trade-distorting subsidies. Governments should also lift restrictions on agricultural exports, expand research, promote science-based regulation and encourage the adoption of innovative technologies, including biotechnology.

64. **Mr. Jahan** (Observer for Bangladesh) noted that nine out of 10 recent disasters had been weather-related, a fact which pointed to climate change as the force behind their severity. The humanitarian implications were significant: research had to be done to provide a better understanding of climate change, and there had to be more investment in risk reduction and preparedness in countries vulnerable to disasters, especially low-lying coastal States. The global food crisis also posed a humanitarian challenge in the short, medium and long term, and the United Nations system must act quickly to assess the needs of the most vulnerable peoples and put in place a comprehensive strategy.

65. Building resilience in the face of natural disasters through national, regional and global action, was critically important. Humanitarian assistance should follow the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality. Predictable humanitarian financing that used flexible, multi-year mechanisms was vital and assistance must be distributed equitably where it was most needed.

66. The development of a stronger standing response capacity, more responsible leadership, more effective delivery of aid and improved coordination would produce better results. The establishment of CERF, a landmark United Nations initiative, would lead to faster, more predictable and needs-based humanitarian assistance in sudden-onset and underfunded crises. The Fund had already proven its usefulness in many parts of the world, including his own country, and deserved to be adequately funded over and above the existing humanitarian contributions.

67. His own country faced natural disasters with relentless regularity. Accordingly, the Government had shifted from the conventional response-and-relief approach to a more comprehensive risk reduction culture. Bangladesh had been one of the first countries to create a national body to oversee risk reduction as a component of its disaster management programme. Its experience had demonstrated that timely and coordinated intervention could significantly minimize the impact of a disaster. Nevertheless, in order to mitigate the havoc wreaked, it was imperative to build global partnerships and cooperation.

68. **Mr. Ali** (Malaysia) said that the number of deliberate attacks on humanitarian workers had reached unacceptable levels. The problem had been exacerbated by misperceptions of their role owing to increasing integration of military with civilian workers in humanitarian missions. It also had to be determined whether, in some situations, humanitarian workers actually did more than humanitarian work, exposing themselves to attacks, or whether the attacks were part of a strategy used by one party to a conflict in order to destroy another.

69. He questioned the usefulness of the plethora of documents, strategies and guidelines being produced with a view to ensuring respect for humanitarian principles when the situation on the ground was so complex and the propriety of using humanitarian action to promote ideas — the "responsibility to protect", for instance — on which there was no consensus.

70. The convergence of the food, fuel and climate change challenges was another issue that needed to be faced squarely. In light of the evidence that climate change would lead to predictable, escalating humanitarian crises, preventive adaptation measures needed to be put in place. The adaptation issue, which required the Council to promote coherent and integrated national efforts, should have been given more attention in the Secretary-General's report.

71. The Council was also a key advocate for the assistance that the developing world needed, not for lack of will on the part of governments but because of their inability to satisfy competing interests arising from the convergence of crises. All democratic societies faced that situation, but the wealthier ones were in a better position to do so. At the same time, thought needed to be given to the multiplier effect of the food and fuel crises on hitherto stable countries that had also become key transit countries for humanitarian aid.

72. **Mr. Strigelsky** (Belarus) said that as a donor of international humanitarian assistance, Belarus had been

involved in operations in China, Iran, Pakistan and Sri Lanka in the past two years and the rescue services of its Ministry of Emergency Situations had been active in areas affected by natural disasters in members of the Commonwealth of Independent States. His delegation called for greater coordination of humanitarian activity among States, United Nations bodies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), aiming for the greatest possible centralization of structures for raising funds and attracting material resources for humanitarian assistance in the interests of promoting rational use of such resources; facilitating considered decisions, particularly in the context of long-term country projects; and avoiding politicization. The United Nations could make a valuable contribution to disaster recovery by helping to establish rescue teams, train personnel and develop national legislation in the appropriate countries. Belarus was willing to share its experience in forming rescue teams and providing targeted humanitarian assistance and to provide courses for specialists at the Ministry of Emergency Situations international training institute.

73. OCHA had achieved positive results in the coordination of post-disaster emergency assistance. However, the urgency of disaster prevention required greater international cooperation in areas such as national and regional infrastructure improvement, with the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction playing a central role. While OCHA already played an essential role in mobilizing resources for humanitarian response, it should broaden that resource base to include innovative sources, including the private sector.

74. **Ms. Eckey** (Observer for Norway) took note of the progress made over the past year in reforming and financing the humanitarian system, enlarging the donor base and strengthening the focus on disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation. On the other hand, as the international community had recently seen in Myanmar, access to life-saving assistance was not a given and respect for humanitarian principles was under constant pressure, as evidenced by the many attacks on United Nations and other humanitarian personnel across the world.

75. Her delegation attached particular importance to the Secretary-General's recommendation for intensified research on the likely humanitarian impact of climate change. His Climate Change Support Team and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change must help Member States improve their understanding of the risks and vulnerabilities involved. Together with the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR), Norway would be submitting to the Intergovernmental Panel a revised proposal for a special report on the management of extreme events, which would also shed light on how climate affected existing patterns of human security, vulnerability and risk.

76. Norway welcomed the Secretary-General's establishment of the High-level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis and was looking forward to the presentation of the Comprehensive Framework for Action. The increased humanitarian need for food, nutrition and health services must be met and would require more funding. The structural causes of the food crisis could not be addressed by the humanitarian community alone, but it should work at field level in close cooperation with the national authorities.

77. There should also be closer coordination between the United Nations, Member States and partners to ensure more effective planning and response in the critical "early recovery phase", immediately after a disaster had occurred and before development cooperation commenced. The recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's report were important, but more concrete recommendations should have been directed to the United Nations and other partners and his recommendation on gender issues (E/2008/71, para. 64 (j)) should apply also to individual Member States, which ought to report more systematically on how gender-sensitive response measures had affected humanitarian situations on the ground.

78. **Mr. Tarragô** (Brazil) observed that capacity-building was central to a timely and successful response to humanitarian emergencies. First and foremost, it was incumbent on States to provide assistance to people in need in their own territories, supported of course by the impressive system developed within the United Nations often complemented by international aid. The fact that 80 per cent of lives were saved in the first 48 hours after the occurrence of a disaster underlined the importance of building Member States' capacities at all levels, including those of the local authorities and organizations of civil society which were often the first responders. Countries should have the operational, technological and institutional means to minimize the

effects of disasters, and additional resources and transfers of technology should help them build disaster risk reduction preparedness.

79. The recent rise in food prices was a burning issue for it strained the humanitarian response capacity of States and of the United Nations. Capacity-building in that area should follow a twin-track approach combining immediate, short-term relief activities with policies that revitalized agricultural production in developing countries as a way of ensuring sustainable aid efforts, although the long-term solution would hinge on the elimination of the protectionism that plagued small farmers.

80. Regional cooperation was also important. In the Latin American and Caribbean region, a network for providing psychological assistance in disasters and other emergencies had been set up. Generally, neighbouring countries were the first to assist and to bear the impact of emergencies with trans-border effects. One of Brazil's humanitarian initiatives was its system for providing food aid to recipients while favouring environmentally responsible, small-scale farmers, both in Brazil and in the recipient countries. Brazil had also provided technical assistance to many developing countries, based on its own agricultural research. His Government was in the process of adopting a national plan on humanitarian assistance, which would include the creation of a "humanitarian warehouse" that would be able to deliver relief assistance within 48 hours anywhere in Latin America and Africa, and within 72 hours elsewhere in the world.

81. **Mr. Hill** (Observer for Australia) said that the progress made in reforming humanitarian response was positive, particularly from the standpoint of improving coordination. The aim should be to make available a larger number of deployable humanitarian coordinators to support the resident coordinators. In light of the different effects of conflict, disasters and climate change on men and women, the mainstreaming of gender issues into all aspects of humanitarian policy and implementation was essential. Humanitarian response should also address gender-based violence, including the vulnerability of women and girls to opportunistic physical and sexual violence, harassment and intimidation and the need to ensure that women had access to reproductive health services in emergencies.

82. Just as disaster prevention, preparedness and mitigation saved lives, devastation occurred when too little attention was paid to those issues. When disasters occurred, the situation must be analysed to determine what could have been done differently, and action must be taken to ensure that humanitarian response made improvements ("building back better") rather than returning to the pre-disaster situation of high vulnerability. With the frequency and impact of weather-related disasters increasing, the links between climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction should be recognized and strengthened.

83. The increasing violence directed at humanitarian personnel was troubling and must be reversed. Locally recruited staff faced particular risks. Member States should ensure that the safety of all humanitarian workers was paramount and, where appropriate, enshrined in national humanitarian policy and legislation. Unhindered, safe and timely access to populations in need was also vital. Recognizing humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence as fundamental characteristics of humanitarian assistance, his delegation urged Member States and other relevant actors to facilitate such access in complex emergencies and natural disasters. Also in connection with access, his delegation acknowledged the need for transparency and certainty regarding the use of military assets in disaster relief and supported the Guidelines on the Use of Foreign Military and Civil Defence Assets in Disaster Relief (Oslo Guidelines) and the Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets to Support United Nations Humanitarian Activities in Complex Emergencies (MCDA Guidelines). There should be further debate on the appropriate and effective use of military assets in disaster response during complex emergencies.

84. **Ms. Blum** (Observer for Colombia) said that humanitarian assistance should be provided in strict adherence to the guiding principles set out in General Assembly resolution 46/182, in particular regarding the neutral and impartial nature of such assistance and the primary role of the affected State in its initiation, organization, coordination and implementation. That issue was of great significance in the case of Colombia, where the Government had assumed responsibility for the coordination and delivery of humanitarian assistance by implementing comprehensive public policies involving the public and private sectors and civil society and developing national plans and

guidelines for disaster prevention and relief. Through its experience with natural and man-made disasters, it had become a model for cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean. It had also responded to humanitarian situations in areas affected by violence and terrorism generated by illegal armed groups. Despite progress in reducing the level of such violence, the implementation of prevention, protection and humanitarian response measures was still a priority. To that end, various legal frameworks, policies and programmes had been implemented under the coordination of her Government.

85. The cooperation of the international community, including the United Nations, was important to complement and support national efforts. Proper coordination between United Nations agencies and other humanitarian actors, and above all, coordination with government agencies was required in order to improve efficiency, coherence, services and coverage and to avoid duplication of effort. The Colombian Presidential Agency for Social Action and International Cooperation had launched an initiative in furtherance of that aim.

86. In light of the emerging humanitarian challenges discussed in the report of the Secretary-General (E/2008/71), her delegation reiterated the importance of strengthening international cooperation and technology transfer for climate change adaptation, developing early warning systems and ensuring disaster preparedness and response. It looked forward to finalization of the framework for action being prepared by the Secretary-General's High-level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis; concerted efforts by States and the United Nations system would be required in order to implement the short-, medium- and long-term actions needed.

87. Emergency humanitarian assistance must be part of a process that helped rebuild the social fabric of affected communities and ensured sustainability after the crisis. It must therefore be in line with measures to build local capacity and avoid fragmentation in the transition from relief to development. Since national and local capacity-building and coordination with national Governments — including during the transition period — were essential in strengthening States' capacity to fulfil their primary role in humanitarian assistance, future reports should include information on the strategies of United Nations agencies in those areas.

88. **Mr. Yao** Wenlong (China) thanked all those who had provided humanitarian assistance to China following the major earthquake which had struck Sichuan province on 12 May 2008. Given the frequent occurrences of natural disasters, and with armed conflicts, climate change and soaring food prices further exacerbating the global humanitarian situation, the issues dealt with in the report of the Secretary-General were more urgent and important than ever and its conclusions and recommendations called for in-depth consideration.

89. As better coordination was increasingly important in light of the range of actors now involved in humanitarian assistance, the coordination role of OCHA should be strengthened and the resident and humanitarian coordinator system improved through enhanced training and the establishment of a relevant accountability system. Further improvements to the cluster approach, which was contributing to better inter-agency coordination, should be made on the basis of experience. His delegation supported OCHA efforts to strengthen cooperation with local NGOs and the private sector in disaster-stricken areas with the approval of the governments concerned.

90. Given the global shortage of humanitarian relief resources and their uneven distribution, his delegation hoped that the United Nations system would intensify its fund-raising efforts and encourage donors to increase their non-earmarked contributions so that assistance funds could be deployed where they were most needed. The international community should support CERF generously since it strengthened humanitarian response capacity by providing start-up funds for sudden major crises and alleviating funding shortages at the early stages of disaster relief, and his delegation hoped that donors would also respond generously to the flash appeals issued by the United Nations system.

91. His delegation supported United Nations efforts to help disaster-prone countries and regions to strengthen disaster prevention, risk reduction and relief capabilities at all levels. As it was essential to make capacity-building in those areas a key goal of humanitarian assistance, it called on the international community to intensify its support for capacity-building activities at all levels, including by providing assistance with the development of early warning systems and promoting technology transfer.

92. China was confronted annually by the need for disaster prevention, risk reduction and emergency relief activities. It attached great importance to international cooperation in humanitarian assistance and had participated actively in international relief efforts in a number of countries, including, during the past year, Pakistan, Peru, Bolivia, Sudan and Myanmar.

93. **Mr. Ja'afari** (Observer for the Syrian Arab Republic) said that while the international community tried to protect individuals from the impact of natural disasters and complex emergencies, its measures were incomplete and selective. Despite international agreements such as the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, civilians paid the heaviest price; the inhabitants of regions suffering armed conflict or foreign occupation faced acts of violence, confiscation of land, forced expulsions and obstacles to humanitarian assistance.

94. The most striking example was that of the occupied Palestinian territory; Israel continued to step up its blockade of the Gaza Strip, depriving its people of their means of subsistence; cutting off water, electricity, food and medicine; and preventing humanitarian organizations from delivering assistance. There had been a major lack of balance in the United Nations response to that situation; the blockade should be condemned by the international community since the Charter of the United Nations did not allow States to violate the rights of civilians, including those living under occupation, and set out the obligations of occupying Powers. The international community, including the Council, had clear responsibilities in that area and should take immediate, concrete steps to implement international humanitarian law in order to achieve the goal of strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations, the subject of the current debate.

95. The situation in the occupied Syrian Golan was similar to that of the occupied Palestinian territory; Israel was seizing land and private property, impeding freedom of movement, taxing agricultural production at punitive rates and making it difficult for the population to live in decent conditions. Its actions were in breach of international law and of its obligations as an occupying Power under United Nations resolutions and the Geneva Conventions.

96. By deliberately preventing access to humanitarian assistance, Israel was jeopardizing the life of civilians. The occupied Syrian Golan should be included in United Nations efforts to strengthen the coordination of humanitarian assistance, especially since the Syrian Arab Republic contributed to CERF. In view of the provisions of Council resolution 2004/50, which called upon States to assist civilians in occupied territories, his delegation urged the international community to put pressure on Israel to meet its commitments under the Geneva Conventions and open the crossing points to allow the passage of humanitarian assistance into the occupied territories.

97. **Ms. Strauss** (Observer for the International Organization for Migration) said that the report of the Secretary-General provided a valuable opportunity to take stock of progress made in developing collaboration and partnership among a broad and growing range of humanitarian actors and to draw lessons concerning new ways of working together in the future.

98. Collaboration and coordination was most relevant to the operational work of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in situations of population displacement. While many organizations were already working together to meet the multifaceted needs of internally displaced persons, the potential of that collaboration was not being fully utilized since the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and the need for unimpeded access to vulnerable populations were ongoing challenges. IOM therefore supported the Secretary-General's call for those issues to be recognized as prerequisites for effective humanitarian response.

99. The usefulness of CERF as a flexible response mechanism, filling the gap between sudden emergencies and the timely availability of cash flows, could not be overstated. The funding that IOM had received from CERF, although somewhat limited, had enabled it to jump-start operations in 49 crises. In light of the strain placed on CERF resources by the food crisis and other complex emergencies, IOM would welcome an increase in contributions to the Fund.

100. On the issue of climate change, IOM was particularly concerned about environmentally induced migration and displacement, a concept that included scenarios ranging from sudden internal or cross-border migration as a result of extreme environmental events to long-term, structural migration patterns in response to progressive environmental change. Such situations

would need to be factored into risk reduction and adaptation strategies at the national, regional and international levels, paying special attention to the different experiences and vulnerabilities of men and women; in situations of forced migration resulting from natural disasters, as in any other crisis or emergency situation, women, girls, boys and men were exposed to different risks and traumas. IOM would be pleased to contribute to the intensified research that the Inter-Agency Standing Committee had identified as needed in order to improve empirical data and analysis and thus to better understand the humanitarian consequences of climate change.

101. **Mr. Laroche** (Observer for the World Health Organization) said that the World Health Organization (WHO) was committed to becoming a credible, predictable and reliable partner in the field of emergency action. In its role as Global Cluster Lead for the Health Cluster, which was working to improve the systematic approach to humanitarian health action and which now needed to be rolled out at the field level, WHO and its health partners had launched 40 per cent more emergency operations in the first six months of 2008 than in the previous two years. In Myanmar, where the Health Cluster was co-led by WHO and the NGO, Merlin, and comprised over 40 agencies, WHO had put in place an early warning system and assisted the Government in carrying out its Post-Nargis Joint Assessment. In China, in addition to relief assistance, WHO had responded to a formal request from the Government to provide psycho-social assistance and reconstruction. The biggest challenge for the Chinese Ministry of Health had been the medical evacuation of tens of thousands of injured people to hospitals across China as the earthquake had rendered many local facilities unsafe, showing the relevance of the WHO, World Bank and International Strategy for Disaster Reduction Hospitals Safe from Disasters Campaign.

102. The issue of climate change called for capacity-building to improve preparedness for response and recovery at the national and community levels. The international community needed to work more effectively with national governments and local authorities since it was those entities, not the United Nations and international NGOs, that were in a position to improve preparedness. WHO was well placed to respond to that challenge. As part of its six-year risk reduction and emergency preparedness strategy, it was working with governments, universities and NGOs to reduce health risks from hazards, including those exacerbated by climate change. An "all-hazards approach" was vital to strengthening the resilience of communities and reducing reliance on external aid. Because less than 5 per cent of all humanitarian funding was currently earmarked for disaster risk reduction and capacity-building, a funding mechanism should be found in order to increase that percentage to 10 to 20 per cent.

103. WHO was very concerned about the health impact of the food crisis, which would result in more severe cases of pneumonia in children, higher death rates among the elderly and less effective treatment for HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis. It was working with UNICEF and other agencies to monitor malnutrition trends, provide policy advice and address health and nutrition impacts at the country level.

104. The role of WHO in emergency situations was increasingly recognized, but underfunding for health through the Consolidated Appeals Process and the narrowing flexibility in the use of funds were of major concern. He urged the international community to pay particular attention to the quality and quantity of funding to the health sector.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.